



## Oral History Interview of Catherine Caraher Finnegan (SOH-015)

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### Oral History Interview of Catherine Caraher Finnegan

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**Interviewed by:** David Robbins

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#### Interview Summary

Catherine Caraher Finnegan discusses her twenty year career at Suffolk University, during which she served as stenographer, secretary to Dean Gleason Archer, secretary of the law school, and assistant treasurer. Finnegan describes her experiences working at Suffolk from 1919 to 1939; the roles and responsibilities she had in her various positions; and the school's expansion over the years. She also recounts her first interview with Dean Archer, what it was like to work with him, and her personal memories of the Dean.

#### Subject Headings

Archer, Gleason Leonard, 1880-1966

Finnegan, Catherine Caraher

Suffolk University

Suffolk University—History

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**DAVID ROBBINS:** This is an interview, conducted on September 6, 1979, with Mrs. Catherine Finnegan, by David Robbins.

**CATHERINE CARAHER FINNEGAN:** As far as the nature of my experience at Suffolk University is concerned, I was a stenographer there. I started out as a stenographer, the only one in the office that Dean Archer<sup>1</sup> ran, and really a one man operation, I know that. There were 333 students. And I gradually—that was during the day, like from nine to five. And then, three or four years later, I was asked to work day and night, with a considerable raise.

**ROBBINS:** Was that when Suffolk opened up its day division?

**FINNEGAN:** No, it wasn't. It was still an evening school. And Dean Archer was in the process of building—I think what you call it now is the Archer Building<sup>2</sup> now, isn't it?

**ROBBINS:** Yes.

**FINNEGAN:** He was building that, which was a big thing at the time, because I think he had to tear down something like twenty little stores on that street, on Derne Street, to make room for that. And so that was in January 1919. I went to work for him there. And I stayed until January '39, which was almost to the day—I left almost to the same day that I began. That's twenty years.

**ROBBINS:** Were you the Dean's secretary the whole time?

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<sup>1</sup> Gleason L. Archer (1880-1966) was founder and president of Suffolk University. After graduating from Boston University Law School and passing the bar examination in 1906, Archer founded Suffolk University Law School. The school expanded its mission during the 1930s to include undergraduate education with the formation of the College of Liberal Studies (1934) and the School of Business Administration (1937). In 1937 Archer became the president of the newly incorporated Suffolk University. Archer remained at Suffolk University until his retirement in 1948. In addition, Archer published fourteen law textbooks and also became a popular radio broadcaster for NBC in the late 1920s and early 1930s. An amateur historian, Archer wrote many articles for various journals and was especially interested in colonial New England history and specifically his ancestry as a Mayflower descendant. Gleason Archer's personal papers, MS108, are housed in the Suffolk University Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Suffolk University's Gleason L. and Hiram J. Archer Building, named after the university's founder and his brother, is located at 20 Derne Street in Boston, across from the back entrance to the Massachusetts State House.

**FINNEGAN:** Then I was the Dean's secretary, after about the third year, a secretary. And then I was secretary of the law school, and then I was assistant treasurer.

**ROBBINS:** What did the secretary of the law school do?

**FINNEGAN:** Registered students. We'd take their tuition from them. We kept records. I signed all report cards. It was a very small—I had two girls—I had two girls—it was an inner office—doing all the mimeographing of exams and everything. All the tuition was paid in my office, records kept.

**ROBBINS:** So you were sort of a combination bursar, and registrar—

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, but just before I left, that was all changed and modernized a little bit. So somebody thought to have that line of students paying their tuition on the first floor was not so hot at the time, so it was brought upstairs. And the Dean's son-in-law was put in charge—well, he was sort of a bursar. He didn't have the title, but he was sort of a bursar. And we collected the tuition, I think, with him there, because it really was very risky, you know, to come right in the door and right in my office and start paying tuition. I know that I had to take their money, stamp, give them a receipt. And I was working at a roll-top desk and I had a basket between my legs, and I was throwing the money in it, like this. Anybody could have come in and said, "Hands up!" in that line. Oh, I did it for years.

But then after a while, somebody decided—I don't know whether—it wasn't the Dean, probably the board of trustees or something, because they used to come in while I was on a tuition day and see it and look like that, and go and see the Dean, and come out, as much as to say, Look at all the money she's handling. And I did handle a lot of money. A lot of money went through my hands.

So that was that. That was one of my duties that was taken away from me, and I had plenty more. The two girls in the other office did nothing but mimeograph all summer long. One girl cut all

the stencils. And my sister, Peg, ran the electric mimeograph, and all the professors' notes—some of their books were that thick—were done in the summer. And then in September, when the boys had come back, then their notes were ready for them. They had notes on every subject except the ones that the Dean wrote his books on. He wrote *The Law of Torts*, *The Law of Contracts*, all kinds of them. But some of the professors would write notes, you know, and once in a while change them. Every third or fourth year, they'd change the information.

**ROBBINS:** When did your sister go to work for Gleason?

**FINNEGAN:** I was there about ten years when one of the—I had two girls in the office. One of them left to get married. And I had a sister at home. She was married and had a little boy. We had another sister. She said yes, she could do it if my other sister would take care of Donald. And she came in. And it was hard work. Those two girls were kept awfully busy. But we had it down with such a system, it was a routine. I don't think, in another office, ten people could have done what we three did and kept everything rolling.

**ROBBINS:** Who was the third girl?

**FINNEGAN:** Dorothy McNamara.<sup>3</sup> Have you heard from her? Have you seen her?

**ROBBINS:** I have. She's a marvelous source of information.

**FINNEGAN:** Well she was. She remembers me? Yeah, I hired her as a seventeen-year-old girl.

**ROBBINS:** She worked for you for about ten years, didn't she?

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah, longer than that, I think.

**ROBBINS:** Twelve. She came to work in '27.

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<sup>3</sup> Dorothy M. McNamara (1910-2003) was employed by Suffolk University from 1927 to 1974, serving as bursar for twenty-five of those years before becoming alumni secretary.

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, yes. Where did you ever find her? I haven't seen her or heard from her—where is she living now?

**ROBBINS:** I don't know. I was put in touch with her through another alumnus of Suffolk who seemed to have kept in touch with her.

**FINNEGAN:** Oh. Probably Kenneth Williams?<sup>4</sup>

**ROBBINS:** No, it wasn't Kenneth Williams. It was one of the younger alumni of Suffolk. She had a lot of friends.

**FINNEGAN:** Have you gotten in touch with—Hiram Archer's<sup>5</sup> daughter worked there for a short time but was in and out of his office, Valerie?

**ROBBINS:** One Richard George. I haven't talked to her, but the university archivist is on very good terms [with her]. Apparently, he thinks of her as a kind of mother figure and she of him as a son. So they get along extremely well. She's been very helpful putting us in touch with the family.

**FINNEGAN:** Good.

**ROBBINS:** You must have worked extraordinarily long hours then.

**FINNEGAN:** I did. I worked from nine to nine, believe it or not. I couldn't have done it, you know, when I was leaving, if I had started those hours. But I grew up with it. You see, we had 133—no 333 students when I went there. And we met the problems as they came along. The First World War men had just come back. And a lot of them registered at Suffolk, and the place

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<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Williams (1902-1980) was a graduate of Suffolk Law School (JD '27) and member of the law school faculty from 1928 to 1958.

<sup>5</sup> Hiram Archer (1878-1966), brother of Suffolk University founder Gleason L. Archer, was the first full-time faculty member at Suffolk. In 1930, he became a trustee, serving the university until his death in 1966.

got too small for them. That's why we built an annex. But that was filled up just like that. And—well, I guess my hours were long, but I didn't think of it that way at the time. The girls would go home at five, and I'd go out to eat and come back again and stay until almost nine.

**ROBBINS:** So you'd stay after the staff left. You stayed on and handled all of your duties?

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, when the students came in and the professors, to see if everything was all right.

**ROBBINS:** Would the Dean stay around the full time?

**FINNEGAN:** He was, because he lived on the top floor. But yes, you could always get in touch with him by the little loudspeaker. But yes, he was there most of the time. His hours were very, very long. And sometimes there'd be a bill come up in the legislature, and they wouldn't want it to pass. It was something that shouldn't have passed, but the people who put it in were all there to talk for it, and there was hardly anybody to say anything against it. So they would call him up and tell him what it was all about. And he'd say, "All right. Give me ten or fifteen minutes." And he'd look it up and think about it and go over there and profess, and it wouldn't go through. Why, isn't that funny?

**ROBBINS:** He was always on call?

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, yes, he was. Isn't that funny, the way you'd never suspect that that's the way the law would work?

**ROBBINS:** What I'm hearing is that you virtually ran the law school on a day to day basis. Not that you made policy.

**FINNEGAN:** I kept things going, right.

**ROBBINS:** That's essentially what your job was. And you just had the two assistants. There was no one else that—

**FINNEGAN:** Well, no, of course, there was another row of offices down the older building. Kenneth Williams, who also taught at night, but also worked in the office and corrected all these papers and exams—not all of them, but some—and then Hiram Archer, who made up the tests and the exams, and he was working alone. And if anybody would come in and say, “Look, I got a 68 on this, and can I have it reviewed and see if I can get a 70?” he'd send him in to him—make an appointment and send him in to Hiram.

Hiram was a hard worker. Hiram, I think, contributed as much as anybody in that school, including the Dean. He was a hard worker.

**ROBBINS:** What sort of things did Hiram do?

**FINNEGAN:** Well, he made up all the tests and the exams, you know. They had a problem, one problem, three times a week on each subject. He did every one of them. That had to be given out every morning, you know, and due one week from then. And then once a month, they had a monthly test on their subjects. And then the mid-year and the final exam—those were all questions he had to keep looking up. He was a very hard worker.

Also, in the end—yeah, he did, he lectured some too. I don't remember the subject he lectured on. They didn't like him very well, because he had an awful squeaky, high, feminine voice. He wasn't a good speaker at all, but he had it up here.

**ROBBINS:** Was that—I guess they called it the Review Department?

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, yes. That was it. I don't remember what we called it. The word “review” was in it.

**ROBBINS:** I seem to recall the Department of Research and Review.



**FINNEGAN:** Yes, that's it, the Department of Research and Review. He was the head of it.

**ROBBINS:** Was that still functioning when you worked in '39?

**FINNEGAN:** Yes.

**ROBBINS:** It was still going?

**ROBBINS:** Yes.

**ROBBINS:** I think it stopped sometime in the midforties and never got picked up again, but that was the Suffolk System.<sup>6</sup> I guess they were very proud of it.

**FINNEGAN:** Yes. But they, after a while, did away with the Suffolk System. It wasn't the case system like BU [Boston University] and Harvard. The Dean had his own system.

**ROBBINS:** Right. Was that done while you were there—

**FINNEGAN:** No, no.

**ROBBINS:** It was still going forward?

**FINNEGAN:** And always, the later deans, after he got through, I didn't know—I knew them because some of them were students and paid their tuition through me—but I wasn't there when the new deans were—Did you read this article about Daisy Donahue<sup>7</sup> that was in the paper?

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<sup>6</sup> Archer believed the case method of teaching was ineffective, particularly for part-time students; he instead chose to teach using the black-letter method, which emphasized textbooks, lectures, and memorization. Archer later altered this method, creating his own "Suffolk method," which added quizzes and homework problems, and, eventually, more discussion and work with cases.

<sup>7</sup> Frank J. "Daisy" Donahue (1881-1979), Suffolk Law School class of 1921, served in several state and local political capacities, including Massachusetts Secretary of State, before being appointed to the Massachusetts

**ROBBINS:** Yes.

**FINNEGAN:** Do I understand that it's his son who was the assistant dean?

**ROBBINS:** That's correct.

**FINNEGAN:** Is that so?

**ROBBINS:** Yes. He's a good man. Malcolm Donahue is a fine man.

**FINNEGAN:** Oh, Daisy was a peach. He was head of the alumni association, and he was teaching—I forget, corporations or something—

**ROBBINS:** He was doing that while you were there still.

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, yes. He was an early graduate of the school.

**ROBBINS:** 1921, I think.

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, yes.

**ROBBINS:** But he was very involved with alumni activities, even in the thirties.

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, very much so, very much so.

**ROBBINS:** Did you see much of him?

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Superior Court in 1932. He was a life member of Suffolk's board of trustees and served as treasurer of the university from 1949 to 1969. Suffolk's Donahue Building at 41 Temple Street is named in his honor.

**FINNEGAN:** No, I didn't, because was out of the school. He graduated in '21. I got there in 19—He graduated in '21, and he was practicing law, and he was half a dozen other things, you know. I think he was on the bench and everything.

**ROBBINS:** Right.

**FINNEGAN:** And the alumni association. Well, I didn't have much to do with alumni association. They met at night, you know, once a month. I didn't pay any attention to that. That wasn't my department at all.

**ROBBINS:** Well they had their own building too, didn't they?

**FINNEGAN:** Yes. Did you run up against the name Alden Cleveland?<sup>8</sup>

**ROBBINS:** I've seen him mentioned in several capacities.

**FINNEGAN:** I think he's dead. I'm not sure. Did Kenneth Williams mention him at all?

**ROBBINS:** He mentioned the name, but he didn't know where he might be found.

**FINNEGAN:** Well, as a matter of fact, he and his wife lived in that alumni building, on the top floor.

**ROBBINS:** Oh, they did?

**FINNEGAN:** His wife was a lawyer. But Alden never passed the bar, but his wife did. She graduated from Portia [Law School]. And they had a family, three children, all married, and one day I picked up the paper, and it was Mrs. Cleveland, with a different name, died. And she wasn't Cleveland any more. She was Mrs. Something Cleveland and then the last name, as

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<sup>8</sup> Alden Cleveland was a close associate of Gleason Archer who lived in, and acted as the resident caretaker of, 73 Hancock Street until 1939. Cleveland also managed the Suffolk Bookstore before serving as Alumni Secretary.

though Alden had died and she married again. And this was her death notice. So that's why I asked you if Kenneth Williams mentioned anything about it.

**ROBBINS:** No, he seemed—

**FINNEGAN:** Did Dot McNamara know anything about him? She was connected with the alumni association.

**ROBBINS:** Right. This is the first time the name has really come up. I've seen it in catalogs.

**FINNEGAN:** Well, all he did in Suffolk was run the bookstore.

**ROBBINS:** Okay. And then he actually lived in that alumni building?

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, yes. And he took care of the alumni records and yes, he lived there. And with the alumni, it was a place for them to meet, and it was a very nice place.

**ROBBINS:** He was sort of a caretaker, then.

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, yes. And he was there, sort of like a receptionist if the alumni were having any affair in there. But he was the bookstore manager at Suffolk. And then over there he was—oh, and then another thing: the Wheeler Preparatory School. Did anybody mention that to you?

**ROBBINS:** That eventually became the College of Liberal Arts, didn't it? When they bought it, they changed it over. No?

**FINNEGAN:** Old man Wheeler never—no.

**ROBBINS:** No, I recognized it. It's the same building, isn't it, 59 Hancock Street?

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, is that where it is?

**ROBBINS:** I think that's where it was.

**FINNEGAN:** Well, it was right in our building, in the Archer Building, when I knew it.

**ROBBINS:** Oh it was?

**FINNEGAN:** Yes.

**ROBBINS:** Oh. Tell me about it.

**FINNEGAN:** The College of Liberal Arts, I mean, started in our building.

**ROBBINS:** Okay, but then it moved over to 59 Hancock.

**FINNEGAN:** Well, that was after my time, then, because I didn't know that.

**ROBBINS:** Okay, what were you going to say about the Wheeler Preparatory School?

**FINNEGAN:** Well, he was a good educator, except that he had an unfortunate manner about him. He was a little, short guy, and he was kind of belligerent. And—let me see what happened. If you didn't quite finish your high school, you could go to the Wheeler Preparatory School. They had high school and I think a couple of professors gave college subjects. If you needed anything to make up, you'd do it there.

**ROBBINS:** So did Suffolk use that as a kind of—

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, and there was a payment on the payroll of Suffolk Law School.

**ROBBINS:** Oh, really?

**FINNEGAN:** Yes.

**ROBBINS:** How long did that go on, for quite a while, or—

**FINNEGAN:** I can't remember. Yes, several years. Several years.

**ROBBINS:** So Suffolk kind of subcontracted out the work that he and his preparatory school did.

**FINNEGAN:** It didn't last very long, because as a matter of fact, I don't think it was too successful an arrangement. I mean, he wasn't the most popular guy in the world. He was a—he had honor, but he wasn't a teacher, you know?

**ROBBINS:** Did you have any connections with the Snyder family? Did you work with them?

**FINNEGAN:** Well, the Snyder family were Mrs. Archer's mother and father. And they lived on the top floor in a little mother-in-law section up there.

**ROBBINS:** This was in the Derne Street building.

**FINNEGAN:** This is in the Derne Street building.

**ROBBINS:** Not in the other building. There wasn't room up there for—

**FINNEGAN:** They lived at the 45 Mount Vernon Street, too.

**ROBBINS:** Oh they did? A whole bunch of them moved down, I guess.

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, yes. Well, her mother was very nice, but nobody could stand the old man. I mean, he was—he wanted—this is funny—he wanted to—the Dean, well, got to support him and make him earn his money, you see. So he decided that at night, he would be at this window and

take tuition from the students, see. So this was way back, when I first came, and before I did it. And he would sit at that window and oh, he was very belligerent. He didn't trust anybody, you know. He was a retired minister, but I knew so much about him, how he treated his family. He was a very suspicious person.

So you put your money over. And say it was forty dollars, they made forty dollar bills then—folded over—he'd push it back. Now, you were in a big, long line and you waited for your turn. He'd push it back and say, "Unfold that. Get to the back of the line." Well, he antagonized so many people. And then he had—here's how peculiar he was—he had a shaker of red pepper and a big, long cooking fork. And one day, I was in my desk—"Don't touch that! Don't touch that!" I was, "What is this for, Mr. Snyder?" "Well," he said, "I'll tell you." He said, "If a man came in for stealing, say 'hand me your money,' I'd hand him the money, just so much. I'd throw red pepper in his face and stick the fork in his hand." (laughs)

Well I told the Dean that, and I said, "He is antagonizing so many men who come in here to pay their tuition by making them lose their place in class." Well, why unfold your money? He thought they were putting it over and giving him twenties that looked like forties. So the Dean stopped that. That was how I—oh, it got so heavy that—the line got so heavy that the Dean would open the door and say, "Come in here," see? And I, at my roll top, would take it. So gradually, they were all coming to me and bypassing him. And finally, the Dean said to him, "Never mind coming." He felt badly about it. But I don't think he'd have ten students if he kept using old man Snyder.

**ROBBINS:** He was kind of relieved of his duties after that?

**FINNEGAN:** Oh, yes. The Dean was supporting him. He was well beyond retirement years. And he stayed there until he had to put him in a home.

**ROBBINS:** There was a man called Henry Rossiter Snyder.

**FINNEGAN:** H. Rossiter Snyder was Mrs. Archer's brother. He was married and lived in Connecticut, married to a woman who (inaudible). And once a year—I don't know what he did. I don't think he worked at all. He had married a very rich woman and he was a country gentleman in Connecticut. That was one thing he did. And once a year, on opening day, you know, there was so much confusion about registration—he would come up, and the Dean would say yes. We'd give him something like twenty or fifty dollars for the day, and he'd sit there and help me take tuition, you know. And he was not accustomed to it. And he caused more confusion than anything else, because you know, on a busy day like that, to have someone who didn't know the rules, you could have killed him. But that's what he did, and that's all he did—just, he probably came around three or four days after opening day.

**ROBBINS:** He was a one day a year man?

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah, that's all we ever used him. I can't remember that they used him—no they didn't—just opening day, he did. You know, as I say, it must be funny for you to listen to it, because it was a one-man operation, the whole thing. There was a question here, I was saying to myself, how will answer this one? I'm trying to find it now. Oh, "who ran things at Suffolk during your time there and how were they run?" (laughs) Dean Archer did everything. Well, he was a very clever man, and of course, when he wasn't there in the office, he was upstairs, writing his books. He had a place down in Norwell, a summer home. And he had about ten acres, and in one section, he built, way off—(inaudible) way off, he built a log cabin, because he was from Maine. And he had a little brook next to him. And he would go down there day after day and write, sometimes stay for three or four days overnight, and write his books there. But he built everything himself, the log cabins, and what is it you put in between them, that—

**ROBBINS:** Oh, the caulking, whatever it is.

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah. He did a nice job.

**ROBBINS:** He built it with his own hands?



**FINNEGAN:** Yes, ever bit it. And he used to take us—he had a boat. And he used to take us out off Humarock—now that would be his daughter Marion, his son Gleason, and myself and his son Allen—three or four other people, I can't remember who. We'd go fishing. And the trout—not the trout, the—what are those flat—

**ROBBINS:** Flounders?

**FINNEGAN:** Flounders. You could look right down and see them biting. So after we all got several of them, we'd go up on the Humarock beach, and he'd slit them just like a fisherman, you know. And he had a frying pan there and then we'd cook them. And while they were being cooked, we'd go round and find flat stones to eat off. That was our plate. And he would be—he had made this little fire, but nobody else in the world could make it like he could. And he would be beating up biscuits and cooking them there. See, he was a cook in a camp in Maine, yeah.

He was a very interesting guy—had an awful lot to him.

**ROBBINS:** It sounds like it. That's a side I hadn't thought about.

**FINNEGAN:** And he was a very nice man to work for, very nice. Sometimes he'd come in, he'd say to Dot or my sister or me, "You look kind of peaked today; what's the matter with you?" "Oh nothing, just tired." "Now look, why don't you drop everything and go down and have an early dinner at Thompson's Spa, on the house?" You know, see, it made you feel good. And he'd come in and say, "You need this thing pulled down"—the shades—"The sun's in your eyes." Always watching out for somebody. Everybody was crazy about him.

**ROBBINS:** Well, that's the same—did the students feel the same way as you did, or—

**FINNEGAN:** Well, the students didn't have the same contact with him, but when they'd say, you know, Could I see the Dean? He would be always very nice to them.

**ROBBINS:** Was he an authoritarian or was he—

**FINNEGAN:** No, he wasn't very, not—I wouldn't say so, no. Except there was one time where when the monitor turned in a couple of students that were cheating. They had BU theological students to monitor the classes when there were tests. And they had their eye on about three boys. They had it down to a system, how they were going to cheat. And the monitors were watching them. So they slyly said, We'll get them. And they did, and they brought them down to the office. Well, I saw the Dean lose his temper right then. I really saw him lose his temper with those boys. He didn't put them out of school, but I don't remember what he did. He scared the devil out of them, anyway.

**ROBBINS:** He didn't lose his temper very often with the kids.

**FINNEGAN:** No, no, he didn't. He had a very even temper.

**ROBBINS:** So that was—

**FINNEGAN:** How is Kenneth Williams, by the way? I haven't seen him—

**ROBBINS:** He's marvelous. He's really on top of things.

**FINNEGAN:** He was younger than I was. Do you know how old he is?

**ROBBINS:** He's in his early seventies, I think.

**FINNEGAN:** Well, I'm seventy-eight.

**ROBBINS:** He's very well off. He's still working every day.

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah.

**ROBBINS:** And he's very articulate.

**FINNEGAN:** Did he know that my husband died? My husband worked—you know, taught there for years.

**ROBBINS:** I know, right.

**FINNEGAN:** Thomas Finnegan. I'm wondering, did he know—

**ROBBINS:** I don't think he did. I don't think I mentioned it to him.

**FINNEGAN:** Once in a while we used to meet in town, in Boston and have a chat about old times.

**ROBBINS:** Your husband left Suffolk about the same time you did, and didn't come back—

**FINNEGAN:** Well, no, about four or five years later, he left town—he left Suffolk, and it was all on account of this Miss [Carolla] Bryant. She was miserable to—they dropped off like flies, most of them.

**ROBBINS:** She was kind of waspish, I guess.

**FINNEGAN:** Oh terrible. You could hear her scolding the Dean all over the building. And we'd say, Oh boy! God, why does he put up with it? Why doesn't he tell her off? He'd just smile and walk away. But he was having an affair with her, you know.

**ROBBINS:** I had heard that.

**FINNEGAN:** And the trustees stopped—she was responsible for having him put out of that position, you know. First they let her go, and then they let him go. And it was too bad, because it was all her doing.

**ROBBINS:** So his open affair with her definitely poisoned his relation with the trustees?

**FINNEGAN:** Oh yes, yeah, certainly.

**ROBBINS:** Do you think it was the fact that he was having an affair with her, or the fact that she was such a terror herself?

**FINNEGAN:** Well, I don't think the trustees knew her like that.

**ROBBINS:** Okay.

**FINNEGAN:** See, they didn't know her. They just knew that—you'd see them going out to lunch and dinner, and come back with her. Finally, she—toward the end, when I think when I was there—she was living up at 72—not Mount Vernon Street, but Hancock Street—where the—was that 59 or—

**ROBBINS:** That was 73, I think.

**FINNEGAN:** Seventy-three, yeah. Well, she was living there.

**ROBBINS:** By now Alden Cleveland had moved on. She was actually in there. Because Dean Archer owned the building, didn't he?

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, he owned the building.

**ROBBINS:** Did he lease it to the alumni association when they had it, or—

**FINNEGAN:** I don't think it was necessary. No, I don't think he leased it.

**ROBBINS:** He just let them use it.

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah.

**ROBBINS:** And she was actually living there.

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah.

**ROBBINS:** Well, well, well.

**FINNEGAN:** Now it may not have been that building, but what other building could it be? I'm quite sure it was that building, 73. It may have been 59 Hancock Street. There's a store on the corner, isn't there? It may have been 59, because I remember—oh, I don't know. I'm mixed up with those two. The Dean owned a lot of property—he owned a lot of buildings, two or three or four of those big rooming houses, too, you know.

**ROBBINS:** Did he plan to use them for the university someday? Or did he just kind of acquire them?

**FINNEGAN:** Well, he acquired them—just some place to put his money, I guess. And he'd rent them to a woman, and she would rent all the rooms, you know, and made quite a lot of money on it. They paid him something like three hundred dollars a month, which was all gravy to him, I mean it more than took care of the taxes from the place.

**ROBBINS:** Right. I've heard stories about registration day, and Dean Archer coming in. And you had this big container full of money, I guess.

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah. (laughs)

**ROBBINS:** And [he'd] just reach in and take the whole staff out to dinner sometimes. Did that actually ever happen, or is that an apocryphal story?

**FINNEGAN:** Reach into the money I was taking? No.

**ROBBINS:** He wouldn't touch that?

**FINNEGAN:** No. Because I'd stay until eleven at night, balancing that money. If he did that, how could I balance it?

**ROBBINS:** Okay, fine. That's—

**FINNEGAN:** No, no.

**ROBBINS:** It sounded like a strange story to me, because he kept very careful records, I know that. Or you did. Were you the one that kept all the records?

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, I did. They didn't have hardly any system at all when I went there. And the system they had, I put in. They didn't have any system at all.

**ROBBINS:** Did you invent this attendance-taking system with the tickets and coupons?

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, yes.

**ROBBINS:** Because that's been highly praised by just about everybody.

**FINNEGAN:** Is that so?

**ROBBINS:** They say that's one of the most efficient systems they've ever seen.

**FINNEGAN:** Is that a fact?

**ROBBINS:** I guess after you left, Dottie McNamara told me a story, after you left, in—I think right after the war, they had an auditor or somebody in. I forget who it was, but it was somebody—an efficiency expert who was going to come in and make the place more efficient.

And they took one look at the system in use and said, That's the most efficient system I've ever seen for taking attendance.

**FINNEGAN:** Isn't that funny? I never heard that.

**ROBBINS:** That's what she told me. I may have the dates wrong, but I know that that's what was said. So you were the one that brought that system in.

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah, that's, I put that in. And then another thing I put in was, when the students would come in the first day, I'd hand them—about a week or two weeks before school opened, I'd have this handbook printed up. As a matter of fact, I got a Harvard handbook, and I copied it from that. And I had every date of every test and every exam for the whole year. And I'd hand it to them. Did you ever see one of my handbooks?

**ROBBINS:** I think I've seen them. They were very small.

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah, little green ones, yeah—with all of the faculty's names. When you were a new student and you took that, you didn't have to ask any more questions. Everything was answered in that.

**ROBBINS:** That system has been kept. We still have a handbook.

**FINNEGAN:** Is that so?

**ROBBINS:** Oh, yeah. I think the law students get one, and then the undergraduate students get one.

**FINNEGAN:** Of course, when I think of Suffolk University, I think of nothing but Suffolk Law School. Are you a lawyer, by any chance?

**ROBBINS:** I am not a lawyer. I teach in the undergraduate school.

**FINNEGAN:** Oh, I see. Do you teach history?

**ROBBINS:** European History. So I'm a relatively new arrival. I mean, it's true, the college is a child of the law school. There's no question about that.

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah, well the law school ran the Suffolk College of Liberal Arts for a couple of years. They weren't making any money, and the law school was taking it in. And as you say, it was a stepchild of the law school. I didn't read all these questions.

**ROBBINS:** Well, let me ask two things that immediately come to mind. One was—

**FINNEGAN:** Is this working?

**ROBBINS:** Yeah.

**FINNEGAN:** Am I saying things that you have to eliminate?

**ROBBINS:** No, I don't think so, not at all. Your title changed in the course of the 1930s, from secretary of the law school to assistant treasurer. Was that just a nominal change? Did your duties actually change, or was that just a change in title?

**FINNEGAN:** It was a change in title, because my duties did not change.

**ROBBINS:** You just did everything. (laughs)

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, I did everything. (laughs)

**ROBBINS:** Okay. The other thing is, Dean Archer, I know—Kenneth Williams mentioned this—especially from about 1930 on—made regular trips to New York to do broadcasting work.



Was he around very much at the law school then? No, he was gone for long stretches of time during the week as well.

**FINNEGAN:** He started out by one night staying overnight, and then two nights, and then three nights. And that's when he met Miss Bryant, because she was working for NBC, and they had just fired her, because I don't think anybody would put up with her nonsense but Dean Archer. And just—God, if you're talking to her, don't let her know I told you all this—and she came back with him after a while, when his course—he was giving a course on law for the—I don't know what the devil. Do you know the name of it? The course he gave in New York?

**ROBBINS:** It was one series of lectures called “Laws That Safeguard Society.”<sup>9</sup>

**FINNEGAN:** That's it. That was it. And he would—it would be one night, but he'd stay a whole week. You know, you'll hear this—I've been presented with a nine weeks old puppy, not housebroken. And he's driving me crazy, but I really, I think I should put him down cellar or something.

(pause in recording)

**ROBBINS:** You were speaking about Dean Archer and his trips to New York for his radio career. Who ran the school in his absence?

**FINNEGAN:** I did, Hiram—and anything that I didn't know, I referred to Hiram—Kenneth Williams. He was there in his office. I wasn't exactly alone. But as far as in the Dean's office, there wasn't anybody.

**ROBBINS:** So the whole full time staff, such as it was—

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<sup>9</sup> “Laws That Safeguard Society,” which ran from 1930-1933, was a weekly radio series in which Archer discussed legal issues.

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah, I'll tell you one interesting thing that happened. It was around the time that the banks were closing down. And Dean Archer was in New York. And I said to him, "There's going to be a tuition day, a big tuition day coming up." "Well, that's all right," he said, "You can handle it." So I handled it. And that day, it was reported or rumored that the Exchange Trust Company was going to close down. So I had about fifty or fifty-five thousand dollars—sixty thousand dollars, probably more than that—ready to call up the bank. And they'd send up two men, you know, they'd show their badges, and then take it back to the bank.

**ROBBINS:** You just had this sitting in your desk?

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, yes.

**ROBBINS:** No safe or anything.

**FINNEGAN:** No.

**ROBBINS:** Oh, my God!

**FINNEGAN:** And I had it all piled up in hundreds, and everything counted. I hadn't balanced it because I hadn't gotten receipts yet of what we'd taken in, but I knew exactly what the (inaudible). So I went to call them up and I said to myself, this is not right. So I went into Hiram, and I said, "Hiram, I've got all this money in hand, and I'm supposed to call the Exchange Trust and have them." I said, "But I know that that's going to close down in a day or two." And I said, "We're going to be out of luck." I said, "What the—"

Now we had Wilmot Evans, who was a trustee, and he was the president of the Boston Five Cent Savings Bank. I said, "Would you approve if I called him and asked his advice, what to do—whether to hold it." I didn't want to hold it over night, but what to do? So I called him, and he said, "I'll send a man right up for it, and we'll put it in our safe until the Dean comes home." He was kind of surprised that the Dean left it so loosely, you know, with me. So we did. And next day, it was closed up.

So the Dean came back two days later, and he said, “What do we do about the Exchange Trust Company? Is all our money tied up?” And I said, “No, they didn’t get it.” And I told him what I did, and he said what a wonderful thing to have happened. So Rumor got red and said, of course, he’d hand it right over to him and told him what to do with it, where to put it. As a matter of fact, I think the Dean kept it in the Boston Five Cent Savings Bank until all this business was over, because that bank was safe as could be, the Boston Five.

But you see, the Exchange Trust Company, the Dean felt as though he should be giving them his deposits, because they were the only bank at the time that would give him a loan when he was building 20 Derne Street, and not at an exorbitant interest, either. Oh, the others would say, Pay 12 percent, something like that. Well they gave it to him for like 8 percent, something like that. So he was very grateful to them. But the banks got hit, just like—the Exchange Trust got hit, just like all the other banks.

**ROBBINS:** So it folded in the thirties, then?

**FINNEGAN:** It folded, and we would have gotten ten cents on the dollar if I had deposited it.

**ROBBINS:** Oh, my goodness.

**FINNEGAN:** As a matter of fact, there wasn’t much left in there, but there was some in there at the time. But they just needed this deposit to keep them going probably another week or so. So I was glad we did that. And the Dean was glad we did that.

**ROBBINS:** Did you by any chance ever meet James Michael Curley?<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> James Michael Curley (1874-1958), a Democrat, served as mayor of Boston for four non-consecutive terms: 1914 to 1918, 1922 to 1926, 1930 to 1934, and 1946 to 1950, and as governor of Massachusetts from 1935 to 1937. He also represented Massachusetts’ Twelfth Congressional District in the United States House of Representatives from 1911 to 1914 and the Eleventh Congressional District from 1943 to 1946. He served jail time in the late 1940s for official misconduct, but remained in office as mayor during that time.

**FINNEGAN:** Yes.

**ROBBINS:** Do you have any idea how the Dean got in touch with Curley? And I know they were—

**FINNEGAN:** Well, he was the governor at one time. I can tell you a funny story. The Dean had a friend, a senator, David I. Walsh,<sup>11</sup> who originally gave him the permission, when he was governor in 1914, a charter for the school to confer degrees. So David I. Walsh was tops in his estimation. He was, he was a wonderful man. He used to call on him for alumni association things here. He'd come and make a speech and everything.

**ROBBINS:** He dedicated the Annex, I guess. Walsh did. He made the dedication of the Annex.

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, he did. Well, there was one big, big graduation we had. It was a huge class. And Curley was governor. And the Dean called him up or gave a specific invitation to speak at graduation. So Curley looked and said, well if anything better comes along—he'd only have to go across the street to do it, you see. He didn't see any political reason why he should. And he turned him down. He turned him down and said no, he's got other things to do. And the Dean says, "All right, that's fine." They talked personally, because the Dean knew he wasn't coming, and he told the Dean he wasn't coming. So everything was understood. And the Dean got in touch with David I. Walsh.

Well, David I. Walsh and James M. Curley were deathly enemies. They wouldn't any more be on the same platform together. So here comes the—Curley heard the day of graduation that David I. Walsh was to do the talk. And you know, he was a very devious sort of person anyway. So he got all his gang together with their uniform, and their flags and everything. And he waited—had somebody wait there. When Senator Walsh would start his commencement address, and he was talking about five minutes, when all of a sudden—and I'm sure Curley had two or three of his men spotted to start the crowd going—the door opened. You know, the two doors

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<sup>11</sup> David Ignatius Walsh (1872-1947), a Democrat, served as the governor of Massachusetts from 1914-1916 and represented Massachusetts in the U.S. Senate from 1919-1925 and again from 1926-1947. Walsh signed the Suffolk Law School charter on March 10, 1914.

opened like that, and here marches in all these uniformed men and Curley. And of course, everyone stood up and clapped. (Robbins laughs) And here was in the middle of Walsh's speech.

Walsh, you could have knocked him over with a feather. He looked, and he had to wait until Curley marched down the aisle, got in—and the Dean's face was pure white. He knew what the political situation was, and he knew this was just a spite on Curley's part. So he said something to him, "I knew nothing about this at all," and Walsh looked at him and said, "Man, you will never get me on a platform again!" So I guess Walsh didn't finish his speech. Curley got up, and everybody stood and clapped, you know. He had people in the audience do that. Are you in a hurry? Am I taking up too much time?

**ROBBINS:** No.

**FINNEGAN:** And well, when it was all over, I don't think Walsh—Walsh just bowed and sat down. I think he left early, before the commencement was over, before the graduation was over. And he came down into the Dean's office—I think his hat and coat were up there—and the Dean came in. And they closed the door, and you could hear Walsh all over the place and the Dean explaining, "I did not know anything about it." Walsh said, "Never was anything done to me like that." And the Dean assured him, but they were never friends after that, never. The Dean actually didn't know anything about it. But of course, everybody got a big kick out of it and said, That's the way James M. Curley operates! And everybody knew that the Dean was dumbfounded, and so was Walsh. Oh, he did a lot of things like that, you know, Curley.

**ROBBINS:** That's a terrible story. That is just—

**FINNEGAN:** Oh my God, should I—

(pause in recording)

**ROBBINS:** Dean Archer managed to get all kinds of testimonials from people written down. If you look through the various catalogs, and you look through a lot of the publications he put out,

he managed to get various kinds of rave reviews about Suffolk from different people—I think Suffolk’s done a wonderful job. Did he have some technique for getting people to say these things in writing? Did he send out some kind of a letter to get—did he solicit testimonials?

**FINNEGAN:** No, he really didn’t solicit testimonies, but he was a very nice guy when he was talking to you. He was very friendly, and anybody he had any contact with liked him very much. Now, are you referring to George Frost,<sup>12</sup> him?

**ROBBINS:** Not just George Frost, but a lot of people that obviously the Dean didn’t know that well, could be quoted and quoted quite accurately in support of the school.

**FINNEGAN:** Well now, I remember one in particular, that isn’t one of the important ones, this REI(?) Institute in Boston. Well, that man is a graduate of Suffolk. And he wrote the Dean a letter once, and he said—he was operating his real estate course for about eight or ten years, and he wrote the Dean a letter, and he said, “I am trying to run my office, run my business like you ran your office. The door was always open. Your secretary was always pleasant, never had to make an appointment. If you were in, we could see you.” And he said, “I always got such courteous treatment from you and your office staff.” Now that was unsolicited, but that’s what you’re referring to. People liked him.

**ROBBINS:** Obviously, if Walsh and Curley could both be his friends, he had to be an extraordinary man. (Finnegan laughs)

**FINNEGAN:** I know it, and they were until that happened.

**ROBBINS:** Was Dean Archer already a friend of Curley’s when you came to the school, do you know? Or did he meet him—

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<sup>12</sup> George Frost, a Boston businessman and president of the Boston Garter Company, became Gleason Archer’s benefactor after a chance meeting on a stagecoach. He helped finance Archer’s education at Boston University and was an ardent supporter of Suffolk Law School from its inception.

**FINNEGAN:** Nineteen twenty-one—he knew him as mayor. I don’t know about dates. I couldn’t tell you what year he was mayor. But he knew him as mayor. He was mayor a couple of times.

**ROBBINS:** Yeah, about four times.

**FINNEGAN:** And then governor. But he had no use for him after that happened. He steered clear of him after that.

**ROBBINS:** Because there was a whole sort of phalanx of Boston politicians that helped Suffolk, who were sympathetic with Suffolk. I know that.

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, yes. Well, he’d gotten pull in the State House. Now for instance, the secretary of the American Bar Association, most of them had no use for an evening law school, and they wouldn’t have anything to do with Dean Archer. Well, the big shot—I can’t remember what his name is now—the Dean turned him right around when he would ask the Dean to make speeches places.

**ROBBINS:** Oh really? Just by meeting him and talking to him?

**FINNEGAN:** Yes, yes.

**ROBBINS:** He was so taken with Dean Archer.

**FINNEGAN:** The name wasn’t Shattuck. What was it? I wish I could remember.

**ROBBINS:** I don’t remember. I should, because I’ve been looking at these.

**FINNEGAN:** The American Bar Association—about every three or four years, they’d have a new president. And they were not friendly to Dean Archer at all, any one of them. For instance, when there would be a list given out of who passed the bar, they’d give Suffolk—of course,

Suffolk was larger than anyone, so of course they'd have more men pass—and it was the media that did it. It was a reporter that would do it, you know. But the Dean got blamed for it, for hogging the statement. The list is out and Suffolk is on top. He used to get a kick out of it, but it wasn't his doing. It wasn't his doing at all. It was somebody in the *Globe* or the *Post*, you know. It figured, well, there were more Suffolk men. There were eighteen Suffolk and eighteen more. Well Harvard's, of course, were all over the country. There'd only be probably six or eight Harvard men. And it made it look as though Suffolk was saying, Well, we're better than anybody else. It wasn't true. And the Dean was blamed for that, and it wasn't his fault.

**ROBBINS:** He was always anxious to publicize the law school, though.

**FINNEGAN:** Oh yes, oh indeed, yes.

**ROBBINS:** I guess in his radio addresses—

**FINNEGAN:** It was his whole life, it was his whole life. I wish I could be more helpful. My mind isn't as keen as it used to be.

**ROBBINS:** No, this is all—you'd be surprised how useful this information is, just little bits and pieces, little details of how the school was run. Were there class tickets used before you arrived, or that's all your institution. When did that start, do you have any idea? Was it after, when you became the—

**FINNEGAN:** Well, it was in the new building, and that was about, I would say 1921, wasn't it?

**ROBBINS:** Yeah, I think it actually was '21 or '22.

**FINNEGAN:** See, a situation would arise and we would meet it. I'd figure out something. I'd tell the Dean and he'd say, "That sounds like a good idea. We'll have them clean it up and we'll do that." But we met the situation because there was a need for it. Our attendance wasn't kept right. In fact, there was hardly any attendance. Well, somebody from the Department of Justice



would come in and say, “Could you tell me, three months ago, if John J. Murphy was attending Suffolk?” and so forth.

**ROBBINS:** You’re kidding. We don’t know that for right now.

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah, well—and I had another system. I don’t imagine that they’d know what it was. There were tickets in the Dean’s office. And as each year would end, I had a girl working on every single name and the address, and if they only went three months. Someone would come in and ask, and I’d say, “Well, you know, he went three months. His attendance was over,” or “He went three years, or he graduated.” Those little cards were so important. They don’t do that now.

**ROBBINS:** They don’t. But that’s the system that was so highly praised. That little—you had like a board up on the wall with things stuck on it.

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah, yeah.

**ROBBINS:** That was just—apparently, it worked extremely well, anyway. And they don’t do that anymore. You do things as they do right across the board, more conventionally. Suffolk has kind of lost its unique character in that sense.

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah, I think it has too. Of course, when it’s a one man operation, it’s true, it could be bound to.

**ROBBINS:** Did you see much of the trustees when you were there, or did they kind of keep away?

**FINNEGAN:** Well, I used to go to the faculty meetings. The trustee meetings were only like once or twice a year. You didn’t go to those meetings. Those were held upstairs.

**ROBBINS:** But the trustees didn’t drop in.

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah. What happened to that beautiful big office on the fourth floor?

**ROBBINS:** It's been broken up, and so has the furniture.

**FINNEGAN:** I have pictures of that. Would you be interested in—

**ROBBINS:** I think I was going to show you one, too. It's a picture of you and the Dean in that office.

**FINNEGAN:** Oh, probably you've got—the big shiny—

**ROBBINS:** That table! The big, huge table. It was eventually cut in half.

**FINNEGAN:** Oh, was it? Was it?

**ROBBINS:** We still have one half of it. I don't know where the other half is.

**FINNEGAN:** Well, you know, the beautiful piece of furniture, the old antique—

**ROBBINS:** The highboy?

**FINNEGAN:** The highboy. When he bought one of those houses on Hancock Street, he bought the furniture. Some of those rooms were furnished, you know, and that was in one of the rooms. He said, "God, this is too good for a rooming house." So he had it moved up. And it matched that table and everything. That's in the picture, I think.

**ROBBINS:** Yes. Oh, it's a gorgeous piece.

**FINNEGAN:** Tell me, is his painted picture still hanging up?

**ROBBINS:** Yes. It's now in what's called the President's Conference Room. It's down on the first floor.

**FINNEGAN A:** This was an excellent likeness of him.

**ROBBINS:** It's a gorgeous portrait.

**FINNEGAN:** And then there was a print in some of the catalogs. It's a pen and ink drawing.

**ROBBINS:** I think I know the one you mean. There are so many pictures of Dean Archer around. I mean, it clearly was his operation.

**FINNEGAN:** Oh, absolutely.

**ROBBINS:** There are a number of pictures of him, as opposed to any other president.

(pause in recording)

**ROBBINS:** Mrs. Finnegan, how did you come to work at Suffolk? What sort of background did you have, and how did you get the job that eventually—

**FINNEGAN:** Well, I lived in Roxbury. And I went to the Grammar and High School in Roxbury, St. Joseph's High School in Roxbury. And we had—it was really more of a business high school than anything else, you know. You were proficient, very proficient in business, English, and bookkeeping and typing and shorthand. It was just poured into us. French or anything didn't mean a thing to us. It was just—in one classroom, one huge classroom, and one great, big, fat nun taught us all. So you were in the same classroom for three years. And by the time you got to be a senior, you knew things off by heart before she'd ask you, because you were in the—she'd say, "Don't you listen. You class, go on with your work. Don't listen." But you couldn't help listening. And over and over again, you'd hear the same thing.

So when we went out, we were good in—you know, in the business world, we were wonderful. That's what we were trained for. If you were going to go to college, you wouldn't go to that school, you see? But in my circumstances, we didn't go to college. We couldn't afford to go to college.

**ROBBINS:** So the school had a reputation for turning out very efficient—

**FINNEGAN:** Oh yes, yes. So I went to—I answered an ad in the paper, and I got an answer from a man who said he picked my letter out from about twenty-five. And here I had two braids down my back, and when he saw me, he said, “You wrote a very nice letter, but come back in ten years.” He said, “You're too young for this job.” It was the Val O'Fall(?) Detective Agency. Can you imagine me, putting a young kid from a Catholic high school, in there? And another thing: my mother was with me, which conked him too.

**ROBBINS:** That was a great scene, actually.

**FINNEGAN:** So anyway, my mother said, “You're too young looking. Nobody's going to hire you. You go to Fisher's Business College.” She knew the president very well. She used to come up and have tea with him. So I went there, and he said—the president came in one day, and I was doing shorthand on the bulletin board, and he said, “What is she doing?” She said, “I don't know, but she can read it.” It was a system the nun gave us that nobody else could read it but us. And he said, “Oh, why don't you come in?” He wanted me to start all over again, you know with the shorthand. And I said, “No. I understand it. I can do it faster than anybody else. I'm not going to start all over again.”

So I worked there for about three—I mean I went there for about three months. And I was all finished. There was nothing else for me to do, so they had me address envelopes until calls came in for jobs. And one day, this call came in from Suffolk Law School. And he said to me, “How would you like to work in a school?” I said, “I just got through with school.” He said, “This is a law school in Boston.” I said, “Oh?” He said, “Do you know where it is? Do you know where the State House is?” I said, “Nope.” He said, “Do you know where City Hall is?”

Well, I was so shocked that I didn't know where the State House was that I said, "Yes, I know where City Hall is." I didn't know where it was. He said, "Oh, all the girls know where City Hall is. That's where you get your license to be married." So he joked with me about it, and he said, "Now tomorrow morning, you're supposed to go to 45 Mt. Vernon Street and see Dean Archer." He gave me this card. The Dean looked at me, and he said, "How old are you?" "Seventeen." And he said, "You graduated from high school?" I said, "Yeah. I graduated from—"

(pause in recording)

**FINNEGAN:** Oh yeah, so he was sending me to Dean Archer. So I went in. The Dean looked at me and said, "How old are you?" My braids were a little long. I said, "Oh, I'm seventeen. I just graduated from high school, of course three months later than usual." So I started working for him. And I stayed there for twenty years. That's the way it started.

**ROBBINS:** So you just walked in, right off the street?

**FINNEGAN:** Well, I had the card. I was sent from Fisher's. Yeah.

**ROBBINS:** What sort of a man would you say Dean Archer was? How would you characterize him?

**FINNEGAN:** Well, he was a farmer. He was really a Maine, state of Maine farmer—a big, tall guy. He was over six feet. Of course, you never had any opportunity to see him, did you?

**ROBBINS:** No, I didn't.

**FINNEGAN:** I should say he was a very sincere man. He had a good personality. Everybody liked him. Everybody but his brother, Hiram. They fought like cats and dogs.

**ROBBINS:** Did they really?

**FINNEGAN:** Hiram didn't like him.

**ROBBINS:** The whole time they were together, then?

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah. He didn't agree with his policies, a lot of his policies. And particularly when he brought Bryant, Miss Bryant, into the situation. He thought surely his brother had lost his mind. And I think Hiram had a lot to do with sending me—oh, I shouldn't say that, I suppose.

(pause in recording)

**FINNEGAN:** When I got home that first day—I had five sisters at home. And I was the youngest and the smallest, and they were all working. And they were laughing at me, saying, Did somebody hire you? (laughs) And I was describing the Dean. And of course, I was seventeen, about this big, and he was over six feet. And he wore—well, I think he was the last person who dressed that way. He wore a collar with a—you know—the wing collar and the striped tie and the frock coat with the two buttons here, and the tails, like Ichabod Crane, you know? And always a great big grin on his face. So I said, "I know nothing." My mother said, "He must be good natured." I said, "No, I think he's laughing at me all the time." That was my first impression of him, was outside of being out of a Catholic school, he was probably the first man I had any contact with, you know, to meet in a business world like that.

**ROBBINS:** Now at that time, he was about forty—

**FINNEGAN:** Thirty-three.

**ROBBINS:** Only thirty-three?

**FINNEGAN:** He was thirty-three.

**ROBBINS:** Oh, my gosh.

**FINNEGAN:** Because I remember.

**ROBBINS:** He was very young, then, to be that successful.

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah, and he wasn't bald. He had hair. His hair was beginning to get gray, but always a big grin on his face. No matter what he said he had a big grin on his face. He used to try to make fun of me, telling people, "I've got to be—" he said, "I don't know whether I'm breaking the law or not."

**ROBBINS:** What did you think of the school itself, the institution? It was just in that one building. Were you—did you know enough to be surprised it was only one building?

**FINNEGAN:** No, no, I didn't even think about it, because you know, I was right out of high school, and I wasn't even thinking along those lines. Later, I thought to myself—well, he was a darn good businessman, to make that thing go as a venture. It went like wildfire, once it got started. Once the boys came back from the First World War, he was inundated with students.

**ROBBINS:** Is that why he originally wanted somebody to work for him, because there were so many back then?

**FINNEGAN:** No. As a matter of fact, he had a young fellow as his secretary. And then the war came along, and he was drafted. And he told the Dean that he'd be back. So when the war was over, he was kind enough to tell the Dean he was back. And he said, well—he had hired me in the meantime, because he didn't have anybody. He said, "I have another job. I don't think I'll be back." Because it didn't pay very much money.

God, I used to get ten dollars a week when I first started there. He didn't have any money. He was very poor. He didn't have any money. He used to take the ten dollars out of his billfold and hand it to me. And one day, he was going to give me a raise, like a couple of weeks, and he took out an extra fifty cents, and I felt sorry for him. I said, "No." He said, "Oh no, you've got to take

that.” But I didn’t want to. It was coming out of his pocket, you know. It wasn’t coming out of the school expenses or anything.

**ROBBINS:** I guess when you started there, it was really—it was right on the tail of two very hard years for the school, the war years.

**FINNEGAN:** Oh yes, yes, very. But the minute the boys started to come back, and he didn’t raise the tuition rate—and they were all anxious to do something. They just fell into this business. They’d have a job and go to school nights. Are you taking this down?

**ROBBINS:** A little bit.

**FINNEGAN:** Who’s going to read this, listen to this?

**ROBBINS:** No one’s going to listen to it.

**FINNEGAN:** Please don’t—I’ve said some things I don’t want anyone to know. I run away with myself.

**ROBBINS:** I would like to get a report of this story of Dean Archer’s test of you that you were talking about before.

**FINNEGAN:** Oh, isn’t that on—

**ROBBINS:** No, it didn’t get down. It’s a really nice story. Would you mind just going over it? You were talking about Reverend Snyder and his—he was a Pennsylvania Dutch person.

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah. Well now wait a minute. That was a different story. Oh, he was taking the tuition then. I wasn’t—when this test was happening to me, I wasn’t touching tuition.



**ROBBINS:** No, I know, but do you think—you'd just been hired. And you were telling me about that.

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah, and I was typing some letters that he gave me. It's a test, you see. And my God, if you ever heard all the things he said, all the legal terms and everything. And I didn't know them, but I did the best I could. And I said to myself, After he reads this, I'm going to be fired. So he read it and he said, "You did very well." He was very pleased with it and everything, and I looked up.

So I was working a couple of weeks when one day, he said, "Don't put your typewriter away." It was in the outer corridor. I used to close down my desk when I'd go out to lunch—"Because I'm going to type some things that I have in the safe, make a record of them." So I said, "All right." I didn't think any more of it. And I went out to lunch. I must have stayed for an hour. And I came back, and he wasn't around. So I walked in, I hung up my hat and coat, and I came over, and I pushed my chair back, which had four legs like this on it, you know. I pushed the chair back to sit, and it was a marble floor. So when you did—these were standing up like this, see, on this leg and on this leg, see.

So the minute I pushed the chair back, I heard two plunks, see—plunk, plunk—and I didn't know what it was. And I looked down like this and saw, twenty dollars. It was this great big—I never had seen a twenty dollar gold piece in my life. There was another one down here. So I pushed my chair around to see if there were any more, thinking Dean Archer was going to take something out of his safe, and he dropped these.

So I couldn't wait until he came back to tell him. And I guess my eyes were popping out of my head to tell him, that look what he missed. Look what he lost. He just picked them up and smiled at me. "Thank you very much." And I thought to myself, "Well, if they were twenty dollar gold, he wasn't very excited about it." But he just did it to test me, see.

So I know where it came from. The Pennsylvania Dutch minister upstairs, he was very suspicious of everybody. And he was telling him I was not—I was Irish, and I was Catholic, and

I was a Democrat—three of the worst things. I think it was the first time he ever came in contact with. I know it was his wife and his mother-in-law, the first time they ever came in contact with a person with horns like that. (laughs) They were very bigoted about Catholicity. Oh, terrible.

**ROBBINS:** So this test that Dean Archer gave you was instigated—

**FINNEGAN:** Instigated by him—oh, absolutely. No question about it.

**ROBBINS:** Because he was convinced you'd make away with—

**FINNEGAN:** Now I don't think Hiram or Ken or anything—I don't think I ever was—too young a kid. I didn't tell anybody that, see—except at home, I told my mother. And she just looked at me and blinked, and she said, "Oh, you came through all right." She says, "I think he was testing you for your honesty." And I didn't know what to think. After a while I thought of it, and after a time, I got kind of insulted to think that he thought I was dishonest. I was right out of a Catholic school. He was the first man I ever came in contact with in business or anything. But he just did it to—I guess he knew I was honest, but he did it to satisfy him.

**ROBBINS:** And you said later on, you confronted Dean Archer—

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah, we talked about it and joked about it. He said, "Yes, that's why I did it."

**ROBBINS:** A remarkable man.

**FINNEGAN:** Yeah, he was. He was a remarkable man.

**ROBBINS:** Do you happen to know how he got on the radio?

**FINNEGAN:** Yes. He knew—now what was that man's name that had—was the head of NBC?

**ROBBINS:** David Sarnoff.<sup>13</sup>

**FINNEGAN:** David Sarnoff, yeah. I don't know what his contact with him is, but he met him at some—oh, at some meeting or dinner or something. He got talking to him. And David Sarnoff talked about the law and lectures and everything. And he asked him if he would like to give a series of lectures. Would he go to New York. He said, "Yes, I'd be tickled to death to do it." Oh, he was all excited about that. He'd go—it was like one night—he'd go that day, give the lecture that night, and come home the next day. Then he met Carolla Bryant over there. So that day, he stayed two nights, and soon he was staying a week, a week and a half. And then pretty soon, he brought her back with him. And that's what started the whole thing.

**ROBBINS:** At least he could continue running the law school that way. Otherwise, he'd just never be there.

**FINNEGAN:** No.

**ROBBINS:** Did you by any chance ever hear Dean Archer speak about his—what he thought the mission of the school was? Did he ever talk about the immigrant community?

**FINNEGAN:** No, I don't ever remember him saying anything about that.

**ROBBINS:** What did—did he ever say anything in your presence about what he thought the mission of the school was, or what the purpose of it was?

**FINNEGAN:** Now, it didn't make any difference to him whether you were black or white or Puerto Rican or what. That didn't make any difference with him at all. He didn't hold it against you, as they would in those days, you know—they did in those days, at BU and a lot of the other schools.

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<sup>13</sup> David Sarnoff (1891-1971) was a pioneer of radio and television broadcasting. He founded the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) in 1926 and served as an executive of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) from 1921 until his retirement in 1970.

**ROBBINS:** But he never mentioned that he was particularly trying to draw immigrants—people from the Irish community or the Italian.

**FINNEGAN:** No, he never—I never thought he did that, either.

**ROBBINS:** He was just trying to give an opportunity to poor men, to boys of any group whatsoever.

**FINNEGAN:** He had written up something. It was like a four page—it was about this big, and it was very finely printed. He called it “The Door of Opportunity” or something. Do you remember—

**ROBBINS:** No, I don’t think I’ve ever seen it.

**FINNEGAN:** (inaudible)

**ROBBINS:** No.

**FINNEGAN:** I’ll tell you why he did it—because there was an argument against—the American Bar Association and some of the law schools that were trying to figure a reason why evening law schools should be done away with. And he was—it was an excellent treatise on it. He worked on it for weeks, and it was printed. And he said a lot about the door of—holding the door of opportunity open to these people when they didn’t have—you know, they didn’t have degrees or anything like other schools. And they wanted to be a lawyer, and they had no opportunity. And he was making the opportunity for them.

No, it didn’t make any difference whether he was black or white. And even when I say black and white, I remember one student he had, he was black. He had an Irish brogue that you could cut with a knife. He was Jewish, and his name was Jesus Cardoza. There was something else about him too that was peculiar. Everything you could think of, it was in him. He was Jewish. Well, we

used to laugh at him in the school, among ourselves over the fact that he was Jewish and he had an Irish brogue.

So one day when he was in the school for something, and I said, “I’m sorry. I didn’t see on your application where you were born.” He said, “Ireland.” Of course, you wouldn’t have to ask him, because—but he was Jewish. And he was born in Ireland. And he must’ve been educated there. He had a good education. And he had an Irish brogue that he never lost.

**ROBBINS:** Did he graduate from the school—

**FINNEGAN:** I don’t remember whether he did or not. Now, I could have told you ten years ago, but I can’t now. And I thought—it seemed so peculiar, every time I used his name, I’d bow my head. Jesus Cardoza! (laughs)

END OF INTERVIEW